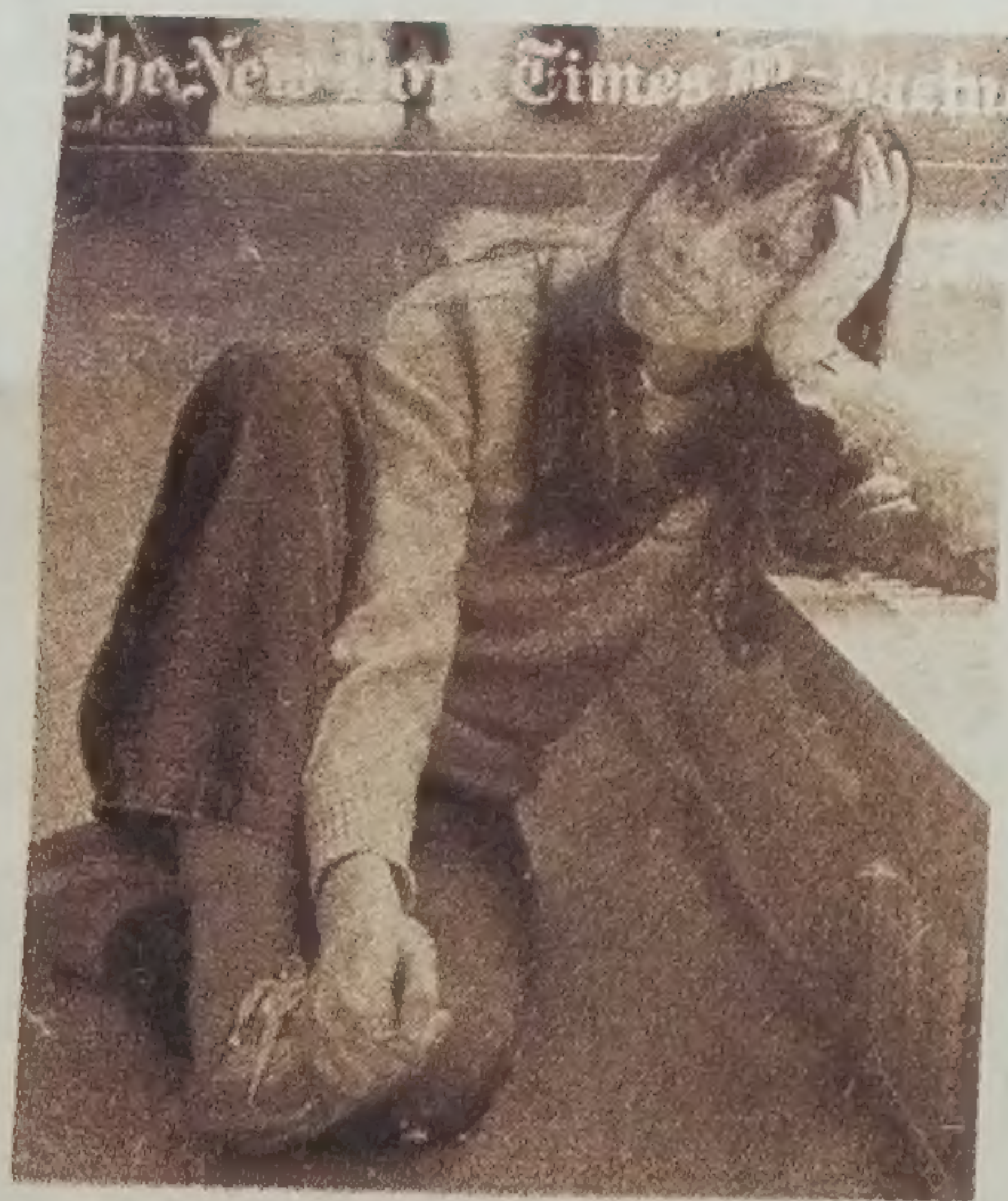


Where have you been, Joyce Maynard?



Joyce Maynard in Keene, N.H., above, and at left on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine*. GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JOANNE RATHE

By Joseph P. Kahn
GLOBE STAFF

KEENE, N.H. — The ad appeared in the Boston magazine *Personals* column last July.

"What Can I Tell You?" it began. "The truth is I'm gorgeous, slender, talented, and passionate. My academic credentials and creative achievements are impeccable. I'd like to meet you if your attributes include integrity, intelligence and loyalty."

"Men pursue me eagerly," the ad concluded, "yet I search for my romantic ideal. I await your letter."

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Joyce Maynard, the subject of that disarming Miss Lonelyhearts item, giggles over it today. Not because it led to a recent romance with a Boston reader — which, happily for her, it has. And not because Maynard's new novel, "To Die For" (Dutton), is itself a fictional reinvention of the Pamela Smart scandal, the saga of an obsessive young woman who defines herself — murderously — in sound bites and surface images.

No, what tickles Maynard six months after the fact are the niggling little details that did *not* appear in the *Personals* blurb, which was actually conceived and written by a professional relationships consultant ("my New Age yenta," Maynard calls her). Here is what the same ad failed to say, but could have:

"DWF, 38, mother of three, living in New Hampshire and looking for love and/or companionship. Former syndicated columnist and putative spokeswoman for the post-1960s liberated generation, I once lived with a Very Famous reclusive novelist, but don't ask me more about that. Heavily into Patsy Cline, free weights, Studs Terkel, motherhood, Oprah, swimming, mass media, Dylan, pop culture, small-town Zeitgeist. My life has been an open book for 20 years. Care to read more?"

What can she tell you? It's the truth. Even if the "academic credentials" part is one degree short of "impeccable."

Throw in Maynard's three previous books (the novel "Baby Love," plus two collections MAYNARD, Page 32

She's had fame
at 18, a column
... and now, a
novel based on
Pamela Smart

Where have you been, Joyce Maynard? Among other places, at the Smart trial

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of autobiographical columns) and the icon-making 1972 New York Times Magazine cover story ("An 18-Year-Old Looks Back on Life," written when Maynard was a Yale freshman) that turned her into a teen-age media sensation, and one finds oneself knee-deep in the minutiae of a young life lived very much in the public eye, for better or for worse.

With the possible exception of the year she dropped out to move in with J.D. Salinger, of course. But that's another story.

"New York magazine did a piece on me last month," Maynard is saying with a warm, wide smile on her face as she sits in her rambling Victorian house near downtown Keene. "The cover headline said, 'She's Back.' My daughter came home from school one afternoon and picked up the magazine. 'Gee, Mom,' she asked, 'where have you been?'"

Maynard breaks up. Good question, that. Very good, in fact.

So... where has Joyce Maynard been, now that her widely syndicated "Domestic Affairs" column and her marriage and her - dare one say it? - wide-eyed innocence have gone the way of the Berlin Wall? An attempt will be made here to answer the question in chronological fashion. Although, as "To Die For" suggests, following life's sequence of events is not necessarily the same exercise as illuminating its grand themes and dark passions.

What one begins with is a simple truth: that she was born to do this. Born, that is, to be a reporter on her own life's beat, as she likes to say. Born to run and born to rant, born to play bluegrass music VERY LOUD while she hunches over a computer keyboard, fiddling with her take on the American Dream.

Born and raised in Durham, N.H., Maynard grew up in what she terms "a hothouse of writing." Both her parents were intellectually accomplished. Max Maynard, her father, was a Canadian painter of some repute first, and later a professor of literature at the University of New Hampshire. Fredelle Maynard, her mother, earned a PhD from Harvard, eventually wrote two volumes of memoirs and served as host for a Toronto-based TV talk show. They split up when Joyce reached college age, in part, the daughter now acknowledges, because of her father's drinking problem. "Our shameful



J.D. Salinger wrote to Joyce Maynard after she appeared in the Times Magazine; soon after that, they were living together.

family secret," she calls it, "the one thing we could never talk about."

It was a silence that may actually have made Maynard more typical of her generation than she realized. It was a silence that almost certainly led her to seek the life of the artist, all the while projecting her innermost fantasies onto clichéd portraits of vanilla Americana, the world of "Ozzie and Harriet" and "Father Knows Best."

"I grew up watching '50s sitcoms and wanting to be the model Donna Reed housewife," Maynard admits, "which was pretty funny, considering I had this highly educated, superachieving mother. But I also believed that women were the more powerful sex. Somehow that contradiction made sense to me."

In grade school Maynard launched her writing career in a neighborhood newspaper. In high school she transferred to Phillips Exeter Academy, joining the elite prep school's first coed class. Published pieces in Seventeen magazine and other periodicals led Maynard to approach The New York Times with an impressive clip file and an already distinctive writing voice.

Her famous Sunday Magazine cover article, which landed her a summer job with the Times and later a staff position there, not only captured a generation's sense of alienation with near perfect pitch. It also yielded hundreds of impassioned letters from Times readers, many of them teen-age boys. No response was more amazing to the suddenly sought-after Maynard, though, than the rambling, advice-filled letter she

received from Salinger, author of the seminal American novel about youthful alienation.

She and Salinger exchanged a lot of letters over the next few months. "I went on to not follow virtually every piece of advice he gave me," Maynard says, with a hint of defiance. But she did make a pilgrimage to Salinger's home. Soon the perky protagonist of "Looking Back" was cohabiting with the Howard Hughes of American letters. Oh my, how the rumors flew then.

That one year out of her life dogs Maynard to this day. How could it not? Salinger's isolation from the outside world could only deepen the mystery surrounding anyone he let in, as readers of Don DeLillo's novel "Mao II" can well imagine (Maynard says she has not read the book, which concerns a famous literary recluse and a young couple who attend him). The relationship ended badly for her - she never went back to Yale, either - and for years she refused to speak about Salinger or their living arrangement. She does now, although not in any great detail.

"I have nothing to hide," Maynard explains, drawing herself up on her living-room sofa. "Jerry is a very private person, as I'm sure you're aware. And I will always respect his privacy. I made that promise a long time ago."

"However, I do have ownership of our shared past. And yes, I can say I was permanently changed by the relationship. He was as much a force in my life as any person I've known. After I left, it seemed like I'd been in 'Lost Horizon.' There was no place on earth for me to go."



1974 PHOTO / ALEX GOTTFRYD

Her private treasure, she adds quietly, is the "extraordinary cache of letters" from Salinger to her that will one day be part of her own children's inheritance, literary or otherwise. She has no plans to share the spoils with a wider audience.

Men pursue me eagerly, yet I search for my romantic ideal. I await your letter.

"It seems like a long time ago now," she sighs.

...

Maynard disappears into the kitchen and returns with a doll. A marionette, really, strings definitely attached. In a house that is a living monument to High Kitsch - from the working jukebox over the kitchen counter to the life-size cutout of Dolly Parton waving a bosomy welcome in the front hallway - it is hard for a first-time visitor to focus on any one particular object, but Maynard has fetched this prop to make a point. In one hand the doll holds an eggbeater. Exhibit A, she calls it, in the Joyce Maynard Meets Betty Crocker liberation movement.

Fifteen years ago, Maynard waved goodbye to the Times and Manhattan and relocated to her country home in Hillsboro, N.H., with artist Steve Bethel, a fellow Yale. Their marriage lasted until 1989, long enough to produce three children and a vision of rural domesticity - sometimes cozy, sometimes cranky - that filled countless newspaper columns and magazine articles pounded out between the diaper changes and the car pools. Professional colleagues left behind in the Big Apple were filled with something else, namely surprise and remorse.

"Leaving was seen as a betray-

al," she acknowledges. "Women of my generation weren't supposed to stop what they were doing to get married and have kids. They were just supposed to do more. That's why you have this whole generation of burned-out women."

Three years ago, Maynard made an even more dramatic break from a life millions of column readers had come to know intimately. Her mother was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. Leaving home to care for Fredelle, Maynard realized that her marriage had come to a dead end, too. She announced her intentions as soon as her mother passed away, and then moved out. The children stayed with their father, temporarily. Maynard wrote about the painful split-up as it was happening. Reactions poured in from distraught fans, and several papers elected to drop the column. "Domestic Affairs" was officially retired last June, when Maynard decided to move on with her professional life and write about something else.

And then along came Pam Smart.

"It was August 3, 1990," Maynard remembers. "I sat down at my desk to begin a novel. I opened the paper and there was a photo of Pamela Smart at her arraignment hearing. The fascination was instant."

Maynard drove to Rockingham County courthouse and observed Smart during pretrial hearings. As a novelist, she says, what most engaged her about the case was not the crime itself but the world that had produced it: the power of television to influence the dreams of a woman

like Pam Smart, and the power of sex to extend that influence over her young accomplices. Maynard wrote the first draft in a white heat that August, completing it well before Smart stood trial in March 1991.

Her adaptation of the Smart story unfolds through the first-person testimony of two dozen characters, one being Suzanne Maretto, a high school teacher and heavy-metal music fan who convinces a pair of hormonally confused students to bump off her husband. While the parallels to real life are obvious, Maynard maintains that Smart and her conviction on murder conspiracy charges were merely the novel's inspiration, not the blueprint for its plot.

The book also offers one twist of fate that never befell the real-life defendant, which Maynard asks that readers of "To Die For" be allowed to discover for themselves. Otherwise, it is straight out of last year's headlines.

"Suzanne represents someone without a moral core," the author observes. "To me she's not so much evil as empty, a woman without a center or a heart. Writing the book was almost like channeling. I had no idea where it was going. I just heard this collection of voices and did my best to listen in."

Dutton paid \$125,000 for the manuscript and ordered a first printing of 35,000 copies. What would Pam Smart think of it, Maynard is asked. She pauses for a long, long time.

"The truth is," she finally answers, "I've never thought much about her reaction. Though I suppose if she were told the novel was about her, she'd be incensed. As I would be if I were in her shoes, I guess."

"They can accuse me of being a vulture, but I didn't want to interview any of the actual participants. I was after something else. The fact that a murder like this could be committed by people I know. People like you and me. Is there a Maiden of Metal in me? I don't know. Maybe."

Maynard looks off in the distance and plays with the strings on her marionette. "I go back more to my family experience, really. The shameful secrets. The day life and the night life. I've never considered myself a glitzy writer, but I've always tried to be an honest one. To me there's nothing more frightening than a secret."

What else can she tell you?